



# CITY OF SEATTLE

March 12, 2019

Representative Gerry Pollet  
46<sup>th</sup> Legislative District  
Chair, Local Government Committee  
[Gerry.Pollet@leg.wa.gov](mailto:Gerry.Pollet@leg.wa.gov)  
*Via email*

**Re. HB 1923 and SB 5812/HB 1797**

Dear Representative Pollet,

Thank you for the letter and for the opportunity to be very clear about our qualified support for efforts to create greater housing opportunity and additional density in our city and around the state through HB 1923 and SB 5812/HB 1797. As Seattle City Councilmembers, both in-district and city-wide, we represent all 725,000 people in Seattle, along with 425,807 workers in our city. Housing unaffordability and lack of available housing options are *the* biggest issues facing cities across the nation. Seattle and Washington cities are living the housing crisis—from workers who cannot afford to live in the city where they work, to longtime residents who are being displaced or watching as their families and friends are pushed further and further from their historic homes and communities, to families and individuals who are falling into homelessness, and seniors and low-income homeowners who are struggling to keep up with their single-family homes and want gentle infill options to help them stay in place. We are pleased to see SB 5812 passed in the Senate yesterday, and we hope to see similar forward movement on the bills before the House.

Seattle, as you correctly indicate, like other cities in the state, has some policy tools to address the housing crisis we're facing. Yet it often takes years to move just one policy item due to a regulatory environment that enables unnecessary delay: fifteen years on Ft. Lawton, four years for MHA, nearly five years on ADU legislation. Despite our best efforts, resources, intense policy development and community engagement to respond, we face significant barriers to adopting progressive land use and housing policies—and we seek leadership from the State to help lift the floor for housing density across Washington.

The housing affordability crisis facing communities in Washington doesn't begin and end within the boundaries of any given city—and every city must do its part to provide for housing that meets the needs of people at all income levels. Similarly, the challenges we face in Seattle which make land use reform an uphill battle aren't unique to our city. We need the State to serve as a partner that creates a baseline of realistic, permissive standards—that's what we are advocating for, not unachievable metrics. We support HB 1923 and SB 5812/HB 1797 because they create a reasonable, achievable baseline for cities to build upon.

When it comes to local action on housing, land use, and zoning for cities grappling with a legacy of historic wrongs rooted in racist redlining policies and continued exclusionary land use practices—we need the state to help set a new floor for addressing housing affordability and undo these historic wrongs. We must recognize this history, and lead with a racial equity lens, recognizing that communities of color have been excluded for many years from access to high-opportunity neighborhoods due to many of the same restrictive land use and zoning policies that remain in place today—and we hope the state sees this as an opportunity to not just champion affordable housing, but help lead the way on dismantling this legacy of institutionalized racism.

The conversation about “local control” versus state preemption is nuanced and should not be used as a reason for state to remain silent on the most pressing economic and social justice crisis facing cities in Washington and across the country right now: lack of affordable housing. We have the same expectation to raise the bar and create smart state-level public policy when it comes to minimum wage, family leave, safety in the workplace. With these labor standards, we worked with the State to lift the floor, and now we look to the State for leadership to help create greater housing and density for cities across Washington. Much like our state’s labor standards provide a base for cities around the state, HB 1923 and SB 5812/HB 1797 will lift the floor for local action on housing affordability and availability. This helps all working families.

We ask you to act with urgency to support these bills. We are losing time, losing housing, losing lives, and losing neighbors. For your reference and background on why our existing tools are not sufficient, we encourage you to review the lengthy, expensive appeals and litigation that have prevented us from building additional housing during the development boom in Seattle. We missed many opportunities to capture that growth to generate critically needed income- and rent-restricted units. Please see the attached **Appendix** for detailed examples from our MHA and ADU policies. The years of legal delay on MHA implementation alone is **estimated to have cost Seattle \$87.8 million worth of affordable housing, or 717 units**. And that is a conservative estimate. While full implementation of MHA is set for a vote by City Council next week, and the ADU legislation will be considered this summer, the lost time and lost units on these policies alone have been a major loss to our city.

What we have learned through these and other local policy processes is there is immense value and need for the state to champion policy change towards addressing housing affordability through land use and zoning. Without the ability to raise the floor in terms of permitting and spurring greater density, we will continue to face lengthy and costly delays at the local level. Noting that SEPA-based litigation is often the result of misusing a tool that was intended to protect the environment, instead, these lawsuits and accompanying delay have caused greater displacement which harms our environment. Seattle is now the third largest mega commuter city in the country—causing additional carbon emissions, which is bad for the health of the environment, bad for the health of our population, and bad for the health of our local economy.

We have barely begun to address the rezoning and housing changes to meet our community need. We have a long way to go. We can’t do this with existing tools you reference in your letter. We can’t afford

to wait while our residents are being displaced and falling into homelessness. The current landscape of piecemeal local policy implementation will provide for incremental change at best and not the broad set of actions we need to address.

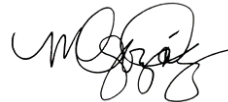
There is no elected official in our region—or our state—that has not recognized the dire lack of housing, specifically affordable housing, and the compounding impact for Washington families, workers, seniors, veterans, and more. A 2015 study found a correlation that indicated for every \$100 raise in rent, there was a corresponding 15% increase in residents who find themselves unstably housed and at greater or imminent risk of becoming homeless. Given the relationship between housing affordability and homelessness, we believe every elected official feels an urgency and responsibility to create the policy tools necessary to create greater housing stock, most of all, affordable options for low- and moderate-income families and individuals.

We support HB 1923 and SB 5812/HB 1797 not only because the legislation will provide leadership for Seattle to pass the policies we need to provide adequate housing options for our residents, but because they will guarantee action across the state.

Sincerely,



Teresa Mosqueda  
Chair, Housing, Health, Energy & Workers Rights  
Committee  
Seattle City Council, Position 8 - Citywide



M. Lorena Gonzalez  
Chair, Gender Equity, Safe Communities, New  
Americans & Education Committee  
Seattle City Council, Position 9 – Citywide



Mike O'Brien,  
Chair, Sustainability and Transportation  
Committee  
Seattle City Council, District 6



Rob Johnson,  
Chair, Planning, Land Use and Zoning  
Committee  
Seattle City Council, District 4

CC: Members of the House Democratic Caucus:

Frank Chopp, [frank.chopp@leg.wa.gov](mailto:frank.chopp@leg.wa.gov)  
John Lovick, [john.lovick@leg.wa.gov](mailto:john.lovick@leg.wa.gov)  
Tina Orwall, [tina.orwall@leg.wa.gov](mailto:tina.orwall@leg.wa.gov)  
Pat Sullivan, [pat.sullivan@leg.wa.gov](mailto:pat.sullivan@leg.wa.gov)  
Eric Pettigrew, [eric.pettigrew@leg.wa.gov](mailto:eric.pettigrew@leg.wa.gov)  
Monica Jurado Stonier, [monica.stonier@leg.wa.gov](mailto:monica.stonier@leg.wa.gov)  
Marcus Riccelli, [marcus.riccelli@leg.wa.gov](mailto:marcus.riccelli@leg.wa.gov)  
Larry Springer, [larry.springer@leg.wa.gov](mailto:larry.springer@leg.wa.gov)  
Lillian Ortiz-Self, [lillian.ortiz-self@leg.wa.gov](mailto:lillian.ortiz-self@leg.wa.gov)  
Christine Kilduff, [christine.kilduff@leg.wa.gov](mailto:christine.kilduff@leg.wa.gov)  
Mike Chapman, [mike.chapman@leg.wa.gov](mailto:mike.chapman@leg.wa.gov)  
Kristine Reeves, [kristine.reeves@leg.wa.gov](mailto:kristine.reeves@leg.wa.gov)  
Jared Mead, [jared.mead@leg.wa.gov](mailto:jared.mead@leg.wa.gov)  
Bill Ramos, [bill.ramos@leg.wa.gov](mailto:bill.ramos@leg.wa.gov)